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THE "WILL TO PERSIST" MEMORANDUM'S CORE ARGUMENT

1. For thirty-six years the Vietnamese Communist Party (now called the Lao Dong) has struggled unrelentingly to acquire political control of Vietnam. During this period the Vietnamese Communists have often altered their strategy, but never their objective. They will not abandon this objective even if once again they should decide to alter the methods through which they endeavor to achieve it.
2. The Vietnamese Communists' present strategy (initiated in 1956 and steadily intensified since 1959) involves a "war of national liberation" orchestrated, controlled and (to an ever increasing extent) supported from Hanoi. This strategy is not intended or employed to seize territory. Instead, it is designed:
 - a. To create and perpetuate chaos in South Vietnam and prevent the development of viable, effective political institutions not under Communist control.
 - b. To create an aura of Communist invincibility and implacable determination.
 - c. To erode the will of the Communists' Vietnamese adversaries and the latter's foreign allies -- principally the United States -- to continue the struggle.
3. Present Vietnamese Communist strategy is appreciably influenced by the course of the Communists' successful 1946-1954 struggle against the French, in which the Communists skillfully used military pressure as a political abrasive and eventually succeeded in making the Vietnam struggle a politically unsalable commodity in metropolitan France, causing the government in Paris to lose its will to continue the fight even though the French Expeditionary Corps remained effective and largely intact as a military force. In this earlier struggle the Communists suffered horrendous casualties and went through periods of severe setback, but their persistence eventually paid off.

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4. The Communists' present strategy is costly in both human and economic terms and is taxing Communist resources in some spheres, particularly within South Vietnam itself. Allied actions both within South Vietnam and elsewhere (e.g., the aerial pressure campaign against North Vietnam and infiltration routes through Laos) are complicating Communist efforts and raising the cost of their execution. However, neither internal resource shortages or allied actions within present political parameters are likely to render the Vietnamese Communists physically incapable of persisting in their present strategy.
5. In absolute numerical terms, the Communists cannot hope to match present and projected Allied force commitments. However, if present estimates of Allied and Communist force projections are accurate, by mid-1967 the Communists will have a slight numerical advantage in tactical combat troops available for commitment to offensive ground operations.
6. The Communists must be disappointed in comparing the present situation with that which existed in the spring of 1965. During the past year their insurgent campaign has lost momentum in both the political and the military fields. They may not be losing the struggle at the present time, but they certainly are not winning it. The Communists are far from being defeated, but (as they themselves implicitly acknowledge) they are now faced with problems greater than any they have had to contend with before in this struggle. Yet Communist attitudes are tinged more with defiance than with pessimism. The Communists may be disappointed, but they do not yet seem to be discouraged.
7. The nature and timing of any Vietnamese Communist decision on altering basic strategy will be affected by a variety of considerations including, particularly, the Communists' assessment of trends in three key areas:
 - a. The course of South Vietnam's political evolution. (The development of a popularly rooted, viable non-Communist South Vietnamese state is the thing which, over the longer term, the Communists have the greatest reason to fear.)
 - b. The course of the military struggle (i.e., whether or not the Communists can inflict politically significant tactical reverses or casualty losses on their adversaries or check the momentum of their adversaries' counterinsurgency programs).

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c. The attitude of the United States (i.e., the Communists' estimate of American will and the U.S. Government's political ability to persevere).

8. The Vietnamese Communists are not likely to consider altering their present strategy within the next eight or nine months. If, during this period, they sense what they consider favorable trends -- particularly in one or more of the three key areas cited above -- the Vietnamese Communists will be inclined to intensify rather than modify their present courses of action. However, if pressures on them are maintained and the events of the next eight or nine months give them no grounds for encouragement -- again, particularly in the three key areas -- by the late spring of 1967 the Vietnamese Communists will probably feel impelled to take stock and consider a change in their basic strategy.
9. Should the Vietnamese Communists decide at this point that continuation of their insurgency along current lines would not be profitable, we believe they would opt for some form of negotiations rather than endeavor to convert the Vietnam struggle into a major war (e.g., by inviting massive Chinese Communist military intervention) or endeavor to achieve U.S. disengagement by simply easing off their pressure in South Vietnam and withdrawing some North Vietnamese troops. A move to negotiations would not necessarily mean the Communists were seeking a political settlement, however, and would certainly not mean they had abandoned their political objectives. The Vietnamese Communists' initial purpose in making or responding to negotiation overtures would be to gain a respite from pressure during which they could rest and regroup their forces, repair their cadre losses (both military and civilian) and decide what would be their most advantageous course of future action.

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